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## A "SYMPOSIUM" ON SOME GREAT BIBLE QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY INSPIRATION.

One of the most vital and essential things in the study of any subject is to know clearly and keep well in view the important points about it. This is particularly true of the Bible, a study of which is in danger of coming to nought or of falling short of what it might accomplish by the choice of what is after all a side issue as the aim of study or by the neglect of those issues which after all are fundamental. The STUDENT has inquired of the scholars and ministers whose names appear below what, in their opinion, are the *four or five great Bible questions* which are in themselves all-important or of particular prominence at the present day. It has recognized that among these questions, that of inspiration has a foremost place. Particular attention has therefore been called to this topic and the suggestions made upon it will be carefully considered.

### I. THE GREAT BIBLE QUESTIONS.

From Professor JOHN D. DAVIS, Ph. D.

The subjects of controversy in regard to the Bible as a book are in and of themselves reducible to four: namely, concerning genuineness, authenticity, inspiration and authority. These questions are all old, but ever new and of supreme present importance. They are discussed by the believer and the unbeliever, are taught by the book itself in some form or other and more or less explicitly in regard to each and all of its parts. In what form and to what extent they are claimed is not only a legitimate but a most imperative subject of inquiry.

Attack on these four doctrines, as well as debate concerning them, varies according to the varying science, philosophy and historical knowledge of the different ages.

The first two of these doctrines, as underlying and conditioning the others, are fundamental: are the Scriptures in whole or in part genuine? are they authentic? At present both are attacked simultaneously and most fiercely with weapons forged in German workshops, with the allegations that numerous glosses of a later age and different spirit are found, that not only supplementary but contradictory accounts are interwoven, that discourses have been manipulated in the spirit of compromise, and that entire books are colored by conceptions not current at the time of the occurrence of the events described.

Genuineness and authenticity being established, the questions of inspiration and authority come up; otherwise not: and these questions, while not so fundamental, are of first importance in reach of influence on doctrine and character. Did holy men write under such divine inspiration that the Scriptures not only contain the Word of God, but are the Word of God? and are

these Scriptures the sole authority in matters of faith and practice, or is Christian consciousness likewise a standard of truth?

*Princeton, N. J.*

FROM REV. ELDRIDGE MIX, D. D.

I. The first question of importance to the Bible Student is that of the inspiration, and consequent Divine authority, of the Bible itself. That is vital and fundamental. Have we in it that which has come from God? Even though it has come through human instrumentality, has He so inspired it, and guarded it in its transmission to us, that we have in it, without mistake or lack, what exactly expresses His mind and will concerning us? There is little spiritual good to be gained from the study of it, unless we know for a certainty, so as to be satisfied beyond question, that we are dealing directly with God through His written Word.

II. A second question of no less importance, is the interpretation of the Scriptures, as to the principles they inculcate through the letter of the Word which often is of local application and coloring. Very much of the Old Testament is an illustration by example of principles that we ought to put in practice, rather than copy the example itself. So it is with the teaching of our Lord and of His Apostles. How does all its teaching touch us of the present day, and take hold on us, is the all important question.

III. A third thing greatly needing to be done by the Bible Student is to get at the whole of Scripture teaching concerning any particular point, so as not to have partial and one-sided views of truth. Take its teaching in regard to God for example. We do not get its entire conception and representation of Him from either Moses, or David, or the Prophets. What we want is a more perfect welding together of the different and partial representations of Him which together will make a perfect portrait of Him for our beholding. So it is with all other truths. We need to study the Bible in this respect constructively, if I may so express it.

IV. The fourth question relates to the life. It is the question of so studying the Bible as to have as the result a more full and perfect living of the truth. The Scriptures are of comparatively little worth to us,—they fail utterly in fact of fulfilling their purpose, if the Word is not made flesh by us. How then shall our growing knowledge of the Scriptures become to us bread for our eating, to be transmuted into good red blood, and make spiritual fibre and muscle? The great problem is how to yoke the intellect and the heart together in their study, so that they shall work together for the spiritual up-building of the whole man.

*Fall River, Mass.*

FROM PROFESSOR JAMES R. BOISE, D. D., LL. D.

You wish me to state what, in my opinion, are "the *four most important questions relating to the Bible at the present time.*"

I submit the following :

1. Is it the inspired Word of God?
2. Does it present to us clearly the only way of salvation?
3. How may we most profitably study the Bible?

On this question allow me to make a few suggestions.

(1) The Bible should be studied prayerfully. Those who do not study it thus will surely fail to apprehend its most important spiritual teachings. *A natural man (an unregenerate man, psuchikos anthrôpos) does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to know (them), because they are spiritually judged (or examined).* 1 Cor. 2: 14.

(2) It should be studied critically, with the utmost pains to ascertain the exact meaning of every word, the exact construction of every sentence, and the true line of argument.

(3) It should be studied, if possible, as a whole; with no part left out, no part slighted, with the light from no part eclipsed.

(4) It should be studied with as much knowledge as we can gain of history, geography, antiquities; that is, of the entire surroundings in which each part was written; always bearing in mind the leading aim of the writer, and comparing his views with those of the other writers of the sacred Word, whether in the Old or the New Testament.

4. Can we safely formulate any statements of Christian doctrine on a superficial knowledge of the Bible?

This is a question of special importance at the present time.

You requested me to mention *four* questions most prominent in my own mind. Allow me to add one more.

5. Does any other knowledge, or any science, compare for a moment in importance with a definite knowledge of the way in which we may become forever "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ?"

To any intelligent human being this question requires no answer.

*Morgan Park, Ill.*

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## II. THE QUESTION OF INSPIRATION.

The following queries were put to the gentlemen whose communications appear below:

1. What is to be understood by the term "inspiration?"
2. What are the elements which must enter into any doctrine of inspiration?
3. What is the right method of procedure in framing a doctrine of inspiration?
4. What change, if any, has Biblical criticism made necessary in the already existing formulated statements of the doctrine of inspiration?

From Rev. THOS. SCOTT BACON, D. D.

1. Inspiration as we are to consider it, is this unique fact that the writings of certain men as collected in the Holy Bible are the Word of God to all mankind. This is a fact which is altogether supernatural, and never was nor could be discovered by our intelligence. So inspiration itself as a fact was revealed directly by God, as first to Moses, "Thus shalt thou say," etc. It is then a mystery as well as a fact and as all facts about God are of necessity. It is beyond human capacity to "find out" these things, or to entirely comprehend them when He makes them known to us for our faith. We are to *believe* with humility and obedience.

2. As is commonly said, there are both the human and the Divine elements in Inspiration. Thus we have the writings of certain men, as Moses, David or the Apostles. But in them we do not so much consider what this or that fellowman of ours thought or knew, as what Another Person—One above us all—is saying to all men. This is indeed such an elevated and spiritual thought that none of us feel all the force which it should have. Yet it is they who with this understanding read those writings most and most attentively, who have the highest sense of this and upon whom it steadily gains. Besides this the most devout and reverent minds are conscious of coming in contact with the thoughts of a fellowman, one of flesh and blood like ourselves,—receiving truth direct from God and communicating it perfectly to us,—yet in much the same way as he would tell us the result of his own thought.

3. If such a doctrine of Inspiration (that is a form of words for stating it,) needs to be framed, I suggest that it should be in the fewest and simplest words,—these as much as may be in the tone and diction of the Holy Scriptures themselves, and also, if possible, in such terms as all the ages of the Church from the Apostles down have used. This last suggestion is not merely sentimentally good. It belongs to the great *principles* of brotherly love and of reverence and faith, which link us to the Gospel and give us a Bible to talk about. All *three* factors in this process should therefore be considered: the Inspirer who speaks, the Prophet who writes and the Church which is "the Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ."

4. I do not know enough about the "existing formulated statements" to answer this. The important thing is, the *fact* that the Spirit of God speaks to us directly in the Holy Bible. This Divine fact and mystery cannot be changed by any man's criticism of the words. It may be denied, or it may be abridged or obscured in some new formulated statement. The former I presume all writers in the OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT would deprecate. The latter, I think, would have much the same deplorable effect:—that the Book would then cease to speak to men with the voice of God. This is my decided judgment after again carefully going over all of the suggestions of such change put forth by some, including the popular theory of Evolution and the so-called "Higher Criticism" of the Hebrew Scriptures.

*Buckeystown, Md.*

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From Rev. Professor JAMES STRONG, D. D.

In response to your interrogatories on the nature of Biblical Inspiration, which I would have preferred to mass together, so as to avoid repetition and confusion, I have time to write but briefly—too briefly, I fear, for the importance of the subject. My views are more fully set forth in the article under the head, "Inspiration" in the *Cyclopædia*, which I prepared myself.

1. *Definition.* Such a special influence of the Holy Spirit upon the sacred writers as to lead them to record statements and teachings intended to be the standard of religious belief and practice for mankind.

2. *Elements.* A careful distinction and harmonious balance of the divine and human coöperation; so that the Bible is at once and throughout the Word of God and yet the word of man.

3. *Doctrine.* To observe that the *materials* for writing were gathered

from various sources, namely, revelation (to the writers or to other parties), historical and general information, memory, and commonsense; while the plan, the method and the phraseology were largely left to the natural but sanctified judgment, habits, special purpose, circumstances and idiosyncrasy of each writer, with only such a preternatural superintendence as to preclude all error in point of fact or meaning.

4. *Adaptation.* The abandonment of the position or nomenclature, "plenary" or "verbal" inspiration, as being both mechanical and unscriptural; unnecessary in theology, and untenable in philosophy and science; misleading and inconsistent with itself. The adoption of these phrases, however, is really a modern phase, carefully avoided at least by the older English theologians, and practically ignored by all sound exegetes.

*Drew Theo. Seminary.*

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From Rev. REUVEN THOMAS, D. D.

1. The special use by God of a man or men providentially prefitted to receive such spiritual truth as was necessary to be communicated to the age in which such men lived, in order that through them the age might have a progressive knowledge of God and of Divine Providence.

2. The recognition of prepared men to receive the Holy Spirit's inspiration; a prepared language through which to communicate the truth conveyed to the man's mind; and an age needing and capable of some advance upon the spiritual knowledge and force communicated to it in the past.

3. A study of the admitted spiritual capabilities of human nature; a study of the relations of man to the Spirit of God; and a study of the claims which the Bible makes for itself to meet man's spiritual need, so bringing God, man and the truth into coöperative harmony.

4. The statements need to be less scholastically, less empirically and more Scripturally expressed, specially so as to recognize that in all his operations the Spirit of God communicates his influences through living men filled with a most abundant and exalted life and not simply through a book which apart from men is but a dead letter.

*Brookline, Mass.*

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From Rev. Professor LEWIS F. STEARNS, D. D.

In answer to your questions, I would say:—

1. By inspiration I understand that unique and supernatural influence of God by which the Bible has been made what it is, namely, the means of converting and sanctifying the individual and building up the Church, by bringing them into saving contact with the historical facts, the divine truth, and the spiritual power, of redemption.

2. The following elements, it seems to me, should enter into a doctrine of inspiration:—

(1) A clear statement of its nature. Inspiration is supernatural, as distin-

guished from the ordinary operations of God's Spirit in the souls of believers and in the Christian Church.

(2) A recognition of its purpose,—to secure a means of grace by which the world in all ages may be brought into saving contact with redemption.

(3) A statement of the result. As a whole and in its parts the Bible perfectly answers the purpose of inspiration.

(4) A recognition of the fact that this end has been attained by a large and free use of the natural and human in subordination to the supernatural.

3. The right method of procedure in framing a doctrine of inspiration, is to study the facts of the Bible. But let them be studied in the right way.

The divine factor, and the perfection of the adaptation of the Bible to its end, will be best understood by the continuous and persevering use of it as a means of grace. This implies not only its use by the individual, but an understanding of the Christian consciousness of the Church in all ages as to what the Bible has been to it.

Light will also be thrown upon the subject by the assertions of the sacred writers respecting their own and each other's inspiration.

Finally, we need to study the Bible exegetically and critically. This will be especially useful in bringing out the human side.

4. Biblical criticism has brought us to see, more clearly than used to be the case, the method of inspiration. The chief agency is undoubtedly supernatural. But we have come to see that inspiration has attained its great object by a free use of the natural and human in subordination to the supernatural, in this respect conforming to the general method of God in his introduction of redemption into the world. The Bible is not a document handed down ready-made from heaven, but has been the result of a growth. Biblical critics tell us,—and we may accept their statements as in general true, without committing ourselves to the theories by which they endeavor to explain the facts,—that considerable portions of the Bible have been made up from previously existing materials, and that the Old Testament, at least, has been subjected to several recensions. Inspiration did not suppress the individuality of the sacred writers, but gave free play to it. In matters lying outside the scope of its great purpose inspiration seems to have made no effort to secure that infallibility in detail which certain critics, judging according to the standards of modern scholarship, are inclined to demand. It did not render the sacred writers scientific historians. It did not secure to them that accuracy in unimportant details which is expected from modern historians, though by no means always attained. It did not render them philosophers or men of science. It did not teach them the methods of scientific exegesis and render them accomplished Biblical critics, according to modern standards.

These facts, and others of the same nature, Biblical criticism has brought to light. Different minds judge them differently. The opponents of Christianity welcome them as disproving the divinity of the Bible. But in so doing they ignore the real purpose of the Bible. The advocates of that theory of inspiration which lays the exclusive emphasis upon the supernatural factor in the Bible, are compelled either to deny the facts or to explain them away. But there the facts are, and they are in great danger of doing what Lord Bacon has described as "offering to the Author of truth the unclean sacrifice of a lie." The sober-minded Christian, however, who is not seeking to maintain a theory but to discover the truth, and who is convinced at once of the truth of the facts and of the divinity of the Bible, views the matter in a wholly different

light. To him the facts referred to are a proof of the divine Wisdom which presided over the formation of the Bible. He sees that the purpose of inspiration is more fully attained by the presence of this human factor. As a plain book for plain men, a book not to be worshipped but to be used, a book not to satisfy the pedantic requirements of scholars but to make needy souls wise unto salvation, a book for all ages and conditions of men, the Bible is rendered the perfect means of grace which it is by the presentation of its supernatural contents in this human form.

*Bangor Theo. Seminary.*

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## Contributed Notes.

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**The Gathering of the Eagles: A Study of Luke 17: 37, and Matt. 24: 28.** Commentators have regarded this word of Jesus respecting the gathering together of the eagles as a dark saying. There is a great diversity of view as to what is meant by the "eagles" and by the "body."

A careful attention to the admitted facts in the case may throw some light on the Saviour's use of this proverb.

1. The discourse in Luke 17: 22-37 was uttered on a different occasion from that of Matt. 24: 4-28 and the succeeding context. Luke 21: 8-36 is parallel with Matt. 24.

2. There are some slight verbal differences in the proverb as reported by Matthew and by Luke. It is likely that Jesus used the same word on the two occasions, and the differences are due to the reporters. The grammatical sense is substantially the same.

3. The connection in which the passage stands is also different—or apparently so—in the two discourses. In Matthew it occurs after a declaration which asserts that there need be no question as to the place where the Son of man is to be seen when he comes. "If, therefore, they shall say to you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." In Luke the proverb occurs in response to a question by the disciples. Jesus, referring to the time of his coming, says: "In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken and the other left. There shall be two women grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left. And they answering say unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Where the body is, thither will the eagles also be gathered together."

We have, then, the same proverb used on two different occasions, and apparently in two different connections. We must find an explanation of the proverb that will fit both. The natural meaning meets the requirement exactly. It is this: Events occur according to a natural order. There need